

Additional Classes for Children with Autism Policy



Douglas Rochestown Educate Together N.S.

This document is intended to provide details of the main policies of Douglas Rochestown Educate Together National School (DRETNS). It is intended to help parents and guardians understand the environment and approach of the school, as well as giving clarity to all staff at DRETNS. This document is regularly reviewed. All feedback is encouraged and welcome.

Version	Description	Authors
October 2022	First version of policy	Board of Management
April 2023	Minor Amendments	LMT
December 2023	Minor Amendments	LMT
April 2024	Minor Amendments	BOM

School Details:

Name: Douglas Rochestown Educate Together National School

Address: Carrs Hill, Douglas, Cork T12 A78N

Telephone: 021 489 0122 / 085 2428753

Email: info@rochestownetns.ie

Roll Number: 20413N

Principal: Dr. Alan Sheehan

We moved to our permanent school building on January 23rd 2023, and the additional classes for children with autism opened on Feb 7th 2023. Two classes were opened on this date, as was sanctioned by the Department of Education. The third class opened in September 2023. Following consultation with staff, it was voted that the additional classes be referred to as 'Multi-Classes' and the area be referred to as *An Crannóg*.

School start/end times are as follows:

Start Time:	End Time:
8.30 am	1.10 pm/2.10 pm

The school doors open at 8.20am and children are supervised in the hall and Central Activities Space of An Crannóg by members of the LMT until 8:30 am. There is a drop off area for parents to park and we operate a rotation system that ensures parents only stop briefly (as per Safety Statement). The LMT supervise the drop off areas to ensure the safety of children as they enter the school building. The school provides supervision of pupils from 8.20am – 1.20pm for Junior and Senior Infants and from 8.20am – 2.20 pm for all other classes. Please note that no responsibility is accepted for anyone in the areas outside the school boundaries. Please also note that no responsibility is accepted for pupils arriving before 8.20am or for supervising pupils after 1.20pm/2.20pm.

Classes for Children with Autism

Introductory Statement

The policy has been formulated in light of a number of background documents, including the *Health & Safety Authority's Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work (2007)*, the *Equality Authority's Code of Practice*, given legal effect in the Statutory Instrument entitled *Employment Equality Act 1998 (Code of Practice) (Harassment) Order 2002 (S.I. No. 78 of 2002)* and the *Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools (NCSE)*. All staff were consulted by email in the process of devising this policy.

Rationale

Following advice from the SENO, the decision to provide Additional Classes for Children with Autism in Douglas Rochestown Educate Together NS was taken by the Board of Management (BoM) of the school in conjunction with the principal, staff and school community in January 2022. This decision was made with a view to providing an appropriate, specialist education within a mainstream setting for children who want to attend our school.

Multi Class A will cater for children in the senior classes, where possible. Multi Class B will cater for children in the middle classes, where possible. Multi Class C will cater for children in the junior classes, where possible. The equality-based, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run principles of Educate Together schools underpin all aspects of school life, including the working of our Multi Classes.

In February 2023 it was decided that the management of these classes and An Crannóg would be the responsibility of an APII post holder. (Julie Field).

Vision

We, the staff of Douglas Rochestown Educate Together NS, aim to offer a positive, inclusive, meaningful educational experience which allows the child to develop to his/her full learning potential in an environment that offers clarity, predictability, understanding and calm.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

The Additional Classes for Children with Autism Policy reflects the overall ethos of the school which states:

Douglas Rochestown Educate Together N.S. is one of a number of equality-based schools throughout the country. The representative organisation for these schools is 'Educate Together'.

Educate Together aims to meet a growing need in Irish society for schools that recognise

the developing diversity of Irish life and the modern need for democratic management structures. In particular, Educate Together guarantees children and parents of all faiths and none equal respect in the operation and governing of education.

The schools operated by the member associations of Educate Together are fully recognised by the Irish Department of Education and Science and work under the same regulations and funding structures as other national schools. However, they have a distinct ethos or governing spirit. This has been defined in the following terms:

- **Equality-based** i.e., all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected
- **Co-educational** and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities,
- **Child centred** in their approach to education
- **Democratically run** with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers (*Source: Educate Together Charter*)

Whilst the concepts of child-centeredness and co-educationalism are now widely accepted in Irish primary education, what distinguishes the Educate Together schools is their hard work in developing a culturally inclusive and democratic ethos. This has pioneered unique approaches to inclusion of minority opinions and faiths in the Irish context.

The schools have developed education programmes which open the eyes of children to the naturally positive contribution that social, religious and cultural diversity and difference of viewpoint and opinion make to society.

The other characteristic feature of these schools is that they are democratically organised and governed. This maximises the potential for building a genuine partnership between the professional, objective role of the teacher and the necessarily personal involvement of the parent in contributing to their children's education.

Information taken from the Educate Together website www.educatetogether.ie

Douglas Rochestown Educate Together N.S. makes the distinction between denominational education and moral/religious education. The ethical curriculum followed by the school is called the Learn Together Curriculum. It is comprised of four strands: Morality & Spirituality, Equality & Justice, Belief systems, Ethics & the environment.

Denominational instruction is facilitated by the school insofar as groups are permitted to use the school premises. This is organised by parents outside of school hours.

The Additional Classes for Children with Autism Policy recognises and endeavours to adopt the values that are set out in the ethos of Educate Together. It attempts to support and sustain a harmonious environment in which the potential of all staff is nurtured through

the co-operation between staff, pupils, parents, board members and all other relevant parties.

Aims

The Additional Classes for Children with Autism Policy aims to:

- Promote the use of positive language
- Identify the criteria for pre-enrolment and explain the procedure for enrolment
- Outline the key roles and responsibilities of the principal, multi class teacher, mainstream teacher, and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)
- Explain approaches to integration and inclusion for the children in the Multi Class
- Describe approaches to teaching and learning
- Encourage participation in various Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in order to enrich teaching in the Additional Classes
- Explain the role of outside agencies
- Outline the equipment, material and resources used within the Additional Classes
- Establish the link between the Code of Behaviour and the classes for children with autism

Positive Language

We use the term “multi class(es)”. We do not use the term “autism unit” or “autistic class” (although these terms may be used in some Department of Education (DE) and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) correspondence).

As research into Neurodiversity and Language continues to grow across the globe, this is an area which is constantly changing and progressing. At DRETNS we welcome this and understand the importance of Neurodiverse communities leading the way in this area and at all times we strive to use the most appropriate, respectful and progressive language. Staff are aware that flexibility is necessary and that certain language/terminology we use with the best of intentions may be deemed out dated from time to time and we aim to keep up these changes and adjust our language and teaching environment accordingly.

Criteria for Pre-Enrolment

According to the latest NCSE Guidelines:

‘In order to access a special class a student must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist) stating that: 1 S/he has a disability (in line with the designation of the special class in question) and 2 S/he has complex or severe learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case. The professional report must meet DE requirements for the particular disability in question. Under no circumstances should a school place a student in a special class without such a professional report.’

Children must have a diagnosis of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (i.e., Childhood Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, mild Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified) made using the DSM-IV, DSM-V or ICD 10 and a letter from a psychologist stating that the child requires an additional class/special class setting. A recent (no more than 2 years old) psychological assessment or a report from a multi-disciplinary team should be provided. A multi-disciplinary team may consist of a Clinical Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech & Language Therapist, Social Worker and a Physiotherapist. Please note all reports should be provided to the school for assessment by the Admission Team (outlined below).

Fulfilment of enrolment criteria does not necessarily ensure admission. Admission may be refused if:

- Necessary resources pertaining to the enrolment are not available
- Sufficient classroom space is not available
- The Board of Management decide that the school is unable to adequately meet the needs of the child

Taking all of the above into account, the Board of Management reserves the right of admission and to refuse admission.

Admissions to the Classes for Children with Autism

Admissions to the Classes for Children with Autism:

1. The school will open an Annual Admissions window for places in our additional classes for children with autism. Families are welcome to register an interest to be informed about the opening of this window.
2. The Board of Management will share the Admission Policy and Admissions Notice for these classes on our website (www.dretns.ie).
3. Applications will only be processed on the basis of a valid diagnostic or psychological report of an autism (i.e., Childhood Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, mild Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified). This must be accompanied by a letter from a psychologist stating that the child requires an additional class/special class setting.
4. Details of unsuccessful applicants are retained by the principal on a waiting list for the rest of the academic year. These details include name, date of application, date of birth, address, email address, telephone number. Should a place become available during the academic year, it will be offered based on the criteria set out on the Admissions Policy.
5. The waiting list is for the academic year for which the place was applied. A new Admissions window is opened for each academic year. Being on the waiting list for one academic year does not automatically entitle an applicant to a place for the

following academic year. The applications process must be followed for each academic year.

Enrolment Criteria for the Classes for Children with Autism as outlined in the DRETNS Admissions Policy (The maximum class size is six pupils)

Classes for students with autism

If the classes for students with autism is oversubscribed the school will apply the following selection criteria to students. These will be applied in the order listed below to applications received within the timeline as set out in the school's annual admission notice for the special class. The child must have a recommendation for the specified category of additional ("special") educational needs provided for in this class.

Priority Category 1:

Applicant students who are already enrolled in the school.

Priority Category 2:

Applicant students who are siblings of children enrolled in the school at the same time.

Priority Category 3:

All other applicants

In the event that there are two or more students tied for a place or places in any of the selection criteria categories above (the number of applicants exceeds the number of remaining places), places will be offered or added to a waiting list by way of the oldest date of birth of completed applications.

Admissions Team for Classes for Children with Autism

Each application will be considered by the Admissions Team. The criteria is set out in the Admission Policy. The team will include:

- The school Principal – Dr. Alan Sheehan
- Deputy Principal – Erica Murphy
- Multi Class Teacher (AP II Julie Field)

A recommendation will be made in relation to each application to the Board of Management (BOM) of the school. The BOM has the right to endorse or overrule any decision made by the Admissions Team.

Upon an offer and acceptance of a place in An Crannóg, the parents/guardians will be required to complete an 'All About Me' form highlighting important information which is necessary for staff to prepare for the teaching and learning of the child.

A meeting will be organised between the parents/guardians and the teacher before the child attends in order to collect further important information ensuring a successful transition for each child.

Discharge from the Classes for Children with Autism

1. It is school policy to facilitate the discharge of pupils from the multi-classes once they have completed 6th class before the first day of the first term of the new school year.
2. Discharge for the purposes of full integration into the mainstream class may also be recommended at any stage in the school year, following consultation with the parents/guardians and relevant professionals.

Appeals

1. If a decision is communicated by Douglas Rochestown Educate Together NS to a parent indicating that the school is unable to accept their child, that parent may request a copy of the Admissions policy and enquire as to what section/sections of the policy justify the refusal.
2. If unhappy with the explanation the parent may appeal the decision, in writing, directly to the Board of Management (BOM).
3. The BOM then considers the appeal and advises the parent, in writing, of its decision.
4. If the parent is dissatisfied with the outcome, the parent may then make an appeal to the Secretary General under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998. Appeals must generally be made within 42 calendar days from the date the decision was notified to the parent. This policy document has an appendix that contains prototypes of all the standard letters and forms from the school relating to the enrolment procedure.

All parents are reminded that it is their responsibility to keep the enrolment officer informed of any change of address or contact numbers. This applies even when there is a sibling enrolled at the school.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the principal APII Post Holder includes;

- Assume overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the policy in co-operation with the Board of Management, Teachers, parents and children
- Monitor the implementation of the policy on an ongoing basis

- Keep relevant teachers informed about the external assessment services that are available and the procedure to be followed in relation to referrals within the Multi Class setting
- Support teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of Autism
- Being a member of the admissions team
- Upholding the Code of Behaviour of the school, where appropriate
- Ensure that all multi-class staff have received the appropriate training in conjunction with the Safeguarding Staff Safeguarding Children Policy.

The roles and responsibilities of the multi-class teacher includes;

- Being the main point of contact for the child's parents/guardians
- Involving parents in the educational process, e.g., Support Plans, Home-School Communication Diaries, etc.
- Preparing a new pupil's Support Plan within six weeks of the first term of the school year in consultation with parents, and in liaison with other staff working with the child.
- Initiating a review of that Support Plan and organising venue, date and time to consult with parents, mainstream class teacher and SNAs
- Planning and implementing educational provision for children enrolled in the multi-class. Support Plans being used as long-term planning and fortnightly plans for short-term planning to enable progression over time
- Co-ordinating the supporting work of the Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) on an ongoing basis
- Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify regular opportunities for inclusion or reverse inclusion, where appropriate
- Communication of all information from the Support Plan meetings with the class teacher
- Working with the mainstream class teacher to identify and implement accommodations that the child with autism may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, where appropriate
- Upholding the Code of Behaviour of the school, where appropriate
- Ensure that all multi-class staff have received the appropriate training in conjunction with the Safeguarding Staff Safeguarding Children Policy

The roles and responsibilities of the mainstream class teacher include;

- Working with the multi-class teacher to identify regular opportunities for inclusion or reverse inclusion, where appropriate
- Working with the multi-class teacher, Special Education Teacher and SNAs to implement accommodations that the child with autism may need to be successful in the mainstream classroom, where appropriate
- Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the Support Plans
- Communicate social/academic progress to parents of children engaging in inclusion in their class from An Crannóg in school reports and parent/teacher meetings.

The roles and responsibilities of the Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) include;

- Supporting students with significant care needs
- Assisting with the care/safety/supervision needs of the children – in the classrooms and around the school, transitioning, on the playground and on school trips
- Assisting with behavioural management programmes
- Guiding the child through tasks and activities designed by the multi-class teacher or the mainstream class teacher
- Data collection/reporting on progress as determined by the multi-class teacher or Principal
- Providing special assistance to children as necessary
- Preparing materials/resources for the children, under the guidance of the multi-class teacher or the mainstream class teacher
- Providing input, where appropriate, during the review stages of the Support Plans and attending Support Plan review meetings, where possible

Inclusion

Inclusion is a way of integrating children from An Crannóg with peers in the mainstream classroom environment and is the school's aim. The nature of all Inclusion shall be determined by the Multi Class teacher following reviews at appropriate intervals and in consultation with the parents, mainstream class teacher, Principal and SNAs.

Inclusion will be noted on Support Plans and reviewed as part of Support Plans where necessary.

“Partial Inclusion” will take the form of contact during specific times of the day or curricular areas, where particular skills and interests and/or learning can be advanced.

“Increased Inclusion” will be put in place for children who are thriving in the Mainstream setting. Success criteria will be based on the level of meaningful learning, socialisation and regulation within the setting.

“Reverse Inclusion” will be put in place for children where Inclusion in the integrated setting is not appropriate. It can be used as a stepping stone to and/or in conjunction with Partial Integration. The focus of “Reverse Integration” will be on social and play skills only.

The minimum level of inclusion for all pupils, where appropriate, will include some lunch times, some group activities and some playground breaks.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The children will access a curriculum based on the Primary School Curriculum (1999) that is matched to their needs and capabilities, through carefully planned Support Plans and through the use of differentiation strategies. Subject areas include; English, Irish (Gaeilge), Maths, Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Music, Visual Arts, Drama, Physical Education and Ethical Education. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessments Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities will be used to augment the implementation of the curriculum where necessary. We also refer to our school's respective Teaching and Learning and Assessment and Recording Policies.

The Department of Education circular 0054/2022, states that all children in Special Classes may be exempt from Gaeilge. Parents of children in the multi classes who wish to avail of this exemption are free to do so in consultation with teaching staff and the principal. Those who would like to learn Gaeilge, may do so in consultation with the aforementioned staff. It is the responsibility of the parents that their child has the appropriate exemption.

An eclectic approach to teaching shall be used within the multi-classes, that is, a range of approaches (including those used in the school's mainstream classes) shall be employed, based on the individual needs of the children.

The main approaches are as follows, but are not limited to; play, language through play, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication – Handicapped Children (TEACCH), Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), Intensive Interaction & Relationship Development, Floortime, Lámh, Language Through Colour and Social Stories.

The implementation of the primary school curriculum will be enhanced through a programme of trips to local places, designed to help further prepare the children for successful living in our community (playground visits, coffee shop, shopping tasks, post office, swimming, etc.). Neurotypical peers may also participate in elements of this programme.

Children who are engaging in inclusion in mainstream classes will be invited to attend all outings and tours with that class, once deemed appropriate & safe, and with the necessary supports in place. A risk assessment may need to be carried out in advance where necessary.

Every effort will be made to ensure consistency regarding substitution of staff in An Crannóg. Where absences are planned, efforts will be made to source staff from within our school to provide cover, and substitute staff will cover them. The SET team will cover teaching staff where possible. Both parents and children of An Crannóg will be informed of upcoming changes to staff where possible to ensure a successful continuation of teaching and learning.

It has been agreed that every effort will be made to ensure children from An Crannóg will not be engaging in inclusion in a Mainstream class where teachers are on job share.

Communication

(In conjunction with the Communications and Confidentiality Policy)

The staff of An Crannóg understand the importance of good, positive and constructive communication between home and school in order to create a suitable and appropriate learning environment for each child individually.

The following steps are taken to ensure this:

- Multi Class teachers will meet with parents/guardians in person in Term 1 to create each child's Support Plan Plus collaboratively.
- Parents/Guardians will also be offered an in person meeting in Term 2 to review the Support Plan Plus. If a child is engaging in Inclusion in Mainstream, the Mainstream Teacher will be invited to this meeting also.
- An end of year report will be sent home in Term 3 and teachers will be available to discuss this via phone should parents/guardians have any queries.
- Multi Class teachers will communicate with parents/guardians via Seesaw/Aladdin to send weekly updates detailing activities and areas of Teaching and Learning. Photos will be sent with consent also.
- More regular communication may be needed from time to time via Aladdin/Phone to discuss any ongoing supports or challenges a child might be facing, and face to meetings may be organised if deemed necessary by the teacher.
- A daily concise report may be required for Home/School communication for some children in certain circumstances, e.g. If a child is pre verbal / has a medical condition/ significant behavioural difficulty.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The BOM will support the accessing of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) by staff. The BOM will provide training on neurodiversity for all staff members on a regular basis to foster the development of a fully inclusive school.

Relevant specialist training is accessed via the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and relevant personnel on staff of Douglas Rochestown Educate Together NS.

All teachers will be expected to complete the following CPD within the first year of teaching in the multi-class setting, subject to availability of courses:

- Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication – Handicapped Children (TEACCH)
- An Introduction to ASD (Primary)
- Safety Interventions

A list of other courses available from the NCSE are displayed on the NCSE website.

SNAs working in the multi-classes are expected to have completed the Safety Interventions course also.

The Role of Outside Services

Support from outside services such as the Health Service Executive (HSE), CDNT, The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), etc., is available to the children and parents of the multi-classes. However, due to a lack of resources and long waiting lists these resources are extremely limited.

No HSE therapies, such as Occupational Therapy or Speech & Language Therapy are provided at the school. However, where a child has access to such supports in a local clinic, health centre or in a private capacity, those professionals will liaise with the multi-class teachers and/or visit the school from time to time.

Equipment and Resources

The children in the multi-classes will have access to equipment and resources which are recommended in their psychological reports, occupational therapy reports and speech & language therapy reports, where possible. When a recommendation is made for a child for a specific piece of equipment such as a sit and lean cushion, a slant board, etc. the parents of the child will be expected to pay for the equipment and as such it is the property of the child. Resources such as theraputty, therabands, fine motor equipment and gross motor equipment will be, where possible, provided by the school.

Children in the multi-classes will have access to the Sensory Room and the Soft Room when needed.

Resources and Assessment Kits will be stored in the Meeting Room of An Crannóg and can be easily accessed all teaching staff where needed.

Reference to Other Policies

The Classes for Children with Autism Policy is linked to other policies within the school;

- The Code of Behaviour Policy
- Admissions Policy, including enrolment in the Additional Class
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Communications and Confidentiality Policy

Summary

This policy has covered the use of positive language, the criteria for pre-enrolment and enrolment in the Classes for Children with Autism, it also discusses the criteria for discharge from the classes. It outlines the roles and responsibilities for the main stakeholders involved. It explains approaches to integration and inclusion, teaching and learning and Continuing Professional Development. The policy has determined equipment,

materials and resources made available to the multi-classes. The links to other school policies have been outlined also.

Success Criteria

Our Additional Classes for Children with Autism Policy will be seen to be working well when;

- We receive positive feedback from pupils, staff members and parents
- All staff are made aware of and are committed to the principles that are outlined in this policy
- A quality driven, appropriate educational service is provided to all children in the multi-classes, within the requirements of all recent legislation pertaining to Special Needs Education
- All efforts are made to ensure the integration and inclusion of children in the Multi Classes into mainstream education, having regard for levels of disability, available resources and suitability for such integration
- The aims set out at the beginning of this policy are achieved

Roles and Responsibility

All staff of the school, under the positive and supportive leadership of the Board of Management and Principal, have both a role and a responsibility in successfully implementing this policy.

The policy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by the policy committee through feedback from members of the school community.

Implementation Date

This policy was implemented in February 2023. Amendments will be implemented immediately.

Timetable for Review

The policy was reviewed by the BOM on 17th April 2024

This policy is to be reviewed during the school year 2024/2025.

Ratification and Communication

The policy has been made available to school personnel via the school website (www.dretns.ie). A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and Skills and the patron (Educate Together) if requested.

Date of ratification:

Signed: _____
CHAIRPERSON OF BOM

Date: _____